United Nations S/PV.5639

Security Council

Sixty-second year

Provisional

5639th meeting

Thursday, 15 March 2007, 3 p.m.

New York

President:	Mr. Kumalo	(South Africa)
Members:	Belgium	Mr. Verbeke
	China	Mr. Liu Zhenmin
	Congo	Mr. Biabaroh-Iboro
	France	Mr. De La Sablière
	Ghana	Mr. Christian
	Indonesia	Mr. Kleib
	Italy	Mr. Mantovani
	Panama	Mr. Suescum
	Peru	Mr. Voto-Bernales
	Qatar	Mr. Al-Bader
	Russian Federation	Mr. Shcherbak
	Slovakia	Mr. Burian
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Ms. Pierce
	United States of America	Mr. Wolff

Agenda

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004) (S/2007/126)

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07-27094 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation concerning Iraq

Report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004) (S/2007/126)

The President: I should like to inform the Council that I have received a letter from the representative of Iraq in which he requests to be invited to participate in the consideration of the item on the Council's agenda. In conformity with the usual practice, I propose, with the consent of the Council, to invite that representative to participate in the consideration of the item without the right to vote, in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Charter and rule 37 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure.

There being no objection, it is so decided.

On behalf of the Council, I extend a warm welcome to the Vice-President of Iraq, His Excellency Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi.

At the invitation of the President, Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi (Iraq) took a seat at the Council table.

The President: In accordance with the understanding reached in the Council's prior consultations, I shall take it that the Security Council agrees to extend an invitation under rule 39 of its provisional rules of procedure to Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

It is so decided.

I invite Mr. Qazi to take a seat at the Council table.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda. The Council is meeting in accordance with the understanding reached in its prior consultations.

Members of the Council have before them document S/2007/126, containing the report of the Secretary-General pursuant to paragraph 30 of resolution 1546 (2004).

At this meeting, the Security Council will hear briefings by Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and by Mr. Alejandro Wolff, representative of the United States, on behalf of the Multinational Force.

I now give the floor to Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq.

Mr. Qazi: The report of the Secretary-General before the Council provides a sobering description of the difficulties facing the Government and people of Iraq in their search for basic security, basic human rights and basic social welfare. The ever-present menace of political, sectarian and criminal violence is yet again a major feature in the Secretary-General's report, reflecting as it does the grim reality of life in Iraq.

While the resulting humanitarian and human rights crisis has deepened, it has also attracted unprecedented attention in the reporting period through the actions of the United Nations system, specifically the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

Because of the severity of the crisis facing Iraq, the Government and the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I) have begun to implement a new security plan for Baghdad. To date the results have been mixed but not insignificant. On the one hand, there has been a marked reduction in the number of violent incidents and of unidentified bodies found tortured and murdered on the streets; militia and insurgent leaders have been arrested from both sides of the sectarian divide; Iraqi security forces have undertaken operations throughout Baghdad's neighbourhoods; and some initial success has been achieved in encouraging displaced families to return to their homes in safety.

On the other hand, there is a widespread belief that the problems that have confronted the people of Iraq and Baghdad in particular may be in temporary abeyance; there have been continuing mass casualty attacks on civilians in east Baghdad and in other towns, mainly through vehicle-borne improvised explosive devices; and chlorine has been used to terrorize the population, even though casualties sustained as a result of its use have not been significant.

The Government of Iraq and the Multinational Force recognize that security measures in themselves, however successful, can provide only part of the solution. To re-establish an acceptable level of security in Baghdad and in Iraq in general, there must be simultaneous progress on the political front. The Government of Iraq will be taking all necessary measures to ensure that all its citizens perceive its actions to be on their behalf and in their interests. Only then will security operations help to bring the people of Iraq together. Previous initiatives, plans and statements did not result in the desired improvements for Iraq's long-suffering citizens.

Conditions must therefore be created for an inclusive and participatory political process to emerge. For there to be progress, there also has to be a general acknowledgement that the constitutionally elected Government must be fully supported and assisted in implementing its reform programmes. The Government, in turn, needs to accord the highest priority to bringing about genuine political reconciliation among the diverse peoples of Iraq, without which no security, political or economic progress will bring lasting stability to the country.

In that context, the constitutional review and legislative processes can be very effective instruments for strengthening national reconciliation, compromise and consensus on fundamental issues. The international community has a significant supporting role to play in that respect. The Baghdad meeting, held on 10 March, of Iraq's neighbours and Security Council permanent members, which was attended by the United Nations and regional organizations, offered an invaluable opportunity to focus on regional and international support to Iraq in its efforts to improve the political and security conditions in the country.

Tomorrow's meeting of the International Compact for Iraq, under the chairmanship of the Secretary-General, which will also be attended by the Vice-President of Iraq, will be able to review what political, legislative, security and economic progress the Government has made and intends to achieve in moving towards a shared national vision for Iraq. I sincerely hope that meeting participants will be able to agree on tangible steps resulting in the official launch of the initiative, thereby setting in motion a national, regional and international process to assist the Government of Iraq in fulfilling its obligations to its people.

In my discussions with senior officials throughout the region, I have been struck by the commonalities in their views on Iraq, especially their commitment to its unity and territorial integrity. Each of them was concerned about the deteriorating security situation and its adverse consequences, not only for Iraq but for the whole region. All declared their readiness to contribute to a process that could reduce violence, strengthen dialogue and bring about conditions for an economic revival that would improve the living conditions of the Iraqi people. It was recognized that failure in this respect would entail severe costs for Iraq's neighbours, including a substantial further increase in the number of Iraqis who would be compelled to seek refuge in neighbouring countries. As the report makes clear, Syria and Jordan have already borne a disproportionate share of that burden.

In my recent discussions in the neighbouring countries, I assured them that the United Nations was committed to ensuring a more coordinated, effective and appropriate response to the growing humanitarian crisis in Iraq. The UNHCR has organized a major conference in Geneva on 17 and 18 April to explain the need for such a response and to encourage donors to make this possible. It is a very positive sign that the Baghdad meeting of the neighbouring States and of countries that are permanent members of the Security Council unanimously recognized that coordinated regional and international action was needed, and that agreement was reached agreed to establish working groups, including one specifically dedicated to the plight of displaced Iraqis inside and outside the country.

Given the very difficult security situation, none of Iraq's neighbours insisted on an immediate withdrawal of the MNF-I, whose presence in Iraq is at the request of the elected Government. Many, however, stated that they looked forward to the Government taking full responsibility for its national security at an early date.

Iraq's neighbours have legitimate interests, expectations and views, which a peacebuilding process in Iraq should take into account. In turn, Iraq's neighbours need to agree on a shared strategy of support for the Government's reform programme and reconciliation efforts. A mechanism to achieve such regional coordination in support of Iraq needs to be considered. The proposal made at the recent Baghdad meeting to establish working groups on security,

refugees and energy supplies could be an important component of such a mechanism. Iraq must be transformed from a theatre of conflict to a theatre of reconciliation, peace and reconstruction. Prime Minister Al-Maliki observed at the meeting that Iraq should not be used as a venue by the regional and international powers to wage their conflicts.

The Secretary-General's report makes clear that the United Nations will encourage all neighbouring States to develop a shared strategy of support for Iraq. This needs to be encouraged by the wider international community. All concerned should do their utmost to ensure that further conflict in the region is avoided, lest this set up a dynamic that spirals out of control.

In recent months, I have been repeatedly struck by the number of times the United Nations has been urged by senior officials in Iraq and in the region, as well as by many of our Iraqi interlocutors, to play a more active, direct and substantive role across a much broader range of issues. In response to the very difficult security situation in Iraq, it is only natural that people's expectations of the United Nations should increase with regard to the restoration of peace and stability in their country. The Government and the people of Iraq deserve the best the United Nations can offer in terms of facilitating reconciliation, as well as human rights and humanitarian protection processes, including addressing the urgent problem of internally and externally displaced Iraqis.

In closing, I would like to thank the Government for its generosity and ongoing support of the Mission. I wish also to thank the Government of Jordan and the Government of Kuwait for their generous logistical support of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). I wish also to thank the MNF-I and the Member States that have provided security and logistical support to UNAMI. In particular, I thank Finland, Germany, Ireland and Luxembourg for their recent contributions to helping ensure the continuation of the force operating as the distinct entity under the command of the Multinational Force. The protection provided by that force is an important component of United Nations security in Iraq, without which the United Nations presence would not be tenable.

The President: I thank Special Representative Qazi for his briefing.

I now give the floor to Mr. Alejandro Wolff, representative of the United States, speaking on behalf of the Multinational Force.

Mr. Wolff (United States of America): At the outset, I would like to thank Iraqi Vice-President Abdal Mahdi for attending this meeting. His presence in this Chamber underscores the Iraqi Government's clear international engagement on behalf of its people. Likewise, I would like to welcome back Special Representative Qazi.

As requested by the Security Council in its resolutions 1546 (2004), 1637 (2005) and 1723 (2006), I am pleased to report on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I) regarding the Force's progress towards fulfilling its mandate.

Despite the sobering scale of the violent attacks, the Iraqi Government and people continue to pursue their political and economic development and security goals. Towards that end, some important steps have been taken since the start of the year.

On 23 January, the Council of Representatives passed a law that established the Independent Higher Election Commission. The establishment of the Commission is a key step in preparing for Iraqi provincial elections. On 26 February, the Council of Ministers approved the draft hydrocarbon law; its passage by the Council of Representatives, together with complementary legislation, will ensure the national control and equitable distribution of Iraq's oil wealth.

During the United Nations-hosted International Compact meeting tomorrow, the final Compact document will be shared with members of the international community. The Compact is a key component of Iraq's efforts to complete its transition to financial self-sufficiency and integration into the regional and global economy. Active participation by regional and global partners in the International Compact with Iraq will be critical to assisting Iraq's development efforts.

Although progress has been made on the electoral and economic fronts, overall violence and the resulting instability continue. In response to the ongoing attacks in Baghdad, Prime Minister Maliki announced in January — and the Council of Representatives approved — the Baghdad security plan to renew the efforts of the Iraqi security forces to lead operations

and secure Baghdad from insurgents and militias. The plan includes a commitment of elements of nine additional Iraqi army battalions to the operation. Announcing a new way forward on 10 January, United States President Bush committed an additional 21,500 United States troops to the Iraqi-led effort, with 4,400 committed in early March. While we must be cautious about drawing conclusions regarding results of the new Baghdad security plan, there has been a decrease in violence in the Iraqi capital since the number of Iraqi security forces there was increased.

Lasting stability in Iraq requires more than a security element, and the Baghdad security plan includes increased economic, political and reconstruction efforts to improve the Government's ability to meet the needs of its people and assist with security. The Iraqi Government will spend $10 billion on infrastructure and reconstruction projects, creating jobs for the Iraqi people. The United States and other Governments have announced assistance plans to support Iraq's reform and development.

Assistance is also needed to address Iraq's grave humanitarian situation. In addition to the daily suffering of Iraq's population owing to the ongoing violence, approximately 2 million Iraqis have fled the country and another 1.7 million persons have been internally displaced. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees launched a $60 million appeal to fund its work over the next year to assist that vulnerable population.

The insurgents, extremists and terrorists remain capable of and intent on carrying out attacks against Iraqi civilians, officials and security forces. The three-month period marks a continuation of violence in the country, although there has been a downturn recently in Baghdad violence, as I noted earlier.

Al-Qaida continues to focus its attacks in order to destabilize the Iraqi Government and force the withdrawal of the MNF-I. As was the case during the previous reporting period, much of the violence is attributable to sectarian motives, including hostility among factions within sects. More than 80 per cent of the violence observed by MNF-I troops is limited to four provinces — Baghdad, Anbar, Salah ad-Din and Diyala — and to within 30 miles of the Iraqi capital itself. However, such violence also occurs in other population centres, such as Kirkuk, Mosul and Basra.

Iraqi civilians and the Iraqi security forces suffer the majority of the casualties. Attacks — such as the 3 February truck bomb in the centre of Baghdad that killed 105 civilians and wounded 251 and the 6 March attacks in Hillah that killed over 100 people and injured more than 150 — continue in an effort to intimidate and demoralize the Iraqi people and destabilize the country.

Infrastructure attacks have decreased, going down from over four per week in 2005 and early 2006 to an average of one per week more recently. Yet weak ministerial oversight and ineffectual rapid-repair teams have proved major impediments to improving the supply of essential services. In announcing the Baghdad security plan in January, the Prime Minister and his Government committed to the following actions by the Iraqi security forces: holding accountable all those who break the law, without regard to sect or political affiliation; denying sanctuary for criminals or murderers; not allowing militias to serve as a replacement for the State control of local security; and providing military commanders with freedom of action and the ability to do what is needed without political interference or micromanagement.

Although it is too early to point to a firm trend, the initial security effort under the new plan has recently reduced violence in Baghdad. The effort has been assisted by citizen-provided tips to find several insurgent bomb-making sites and weapons caches in the Baghdad area. As part of the measures to address the source of the violence, the Iraqi Government has allocated about $150 million of its 2007 budget for a demobilization, disarmament and reintegration process for militias. Putting that process into action, together with continued political progress on national reconciliation and the passage of a de-Ba'athification law, are important components in ensuring long-term stability in the country.

The Iraqi security forces are increasingly taking the operational lead and demonstrating an increased capacity to plan and execute counter-insurgency operations. On 20 December 2006, the MNF-I transferred security responsibility for An-Najaf province, which has a population of nearly 1 million residents, to provincial Iraqi control. In February, the British Government announced that it would withdraw 1,600 of its 7,100 troops from southern Iraq by the end of the year as it transitions increased security responsibility to the Iraqi security forces.

As of 5 March 2007, eight division headquarters, 31 brigade headquarters and 93 Iraqi army battalions had assumed the lead for counter-insurgency operations within their assigned areas of operations. Iraq and the MNF-I continue to work to address the logistical and sustainment-capability needs of the Iraqi security forces.

Coordination between Iraqi and MNF-I forces in security operations has been good. On 27 February, special Iraqi army forces detained 16 suspected militiamen during operations with Coalition advisers in Sadr City, targeting the leadership of several rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi cells, who allegedly direct and perpetrate sectarian murder, torture and kidnapping. Iraqi cooperation with the MNF-I is also evident in other areas of Iraq. Last month, approximately 500 Iraqi police led a large-scale operation in Anbar province that resulted in the capture of 13 known terrorists and one large weapons cache. A combined force of 1,000 soldiers from both the Iraqi and the United States armies cordoned off the area to assist the police during the operation. Continued coordination is critical in order to combat the ongoing threat to peace and stability in the country and to prepare Iraqis for assuming full responsibility for the country's security.

The United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), under the leadership of Special Representative of the Secretary-General Ashraf Qazi, is playing an important role in support of Iraq. United Nations leadership and expertise will continue to be needed as Iraq moves forward to prepare for provincial elections, conduct possible referendums, continue work on national reconciliation and the constitutional review and implement the International Compact. The efforts of the United Nations to protect and promote the rights of Iraqis and to assist the vulnerable are also critical elements for Iraqi stability. A robust UNAMI presence remains essential to those efforts.

In addition to Baghdad, the United Nations has representatives in Irbil and Basra. The Multinational Force in Iraq continues to assist UNAMI and to help UNAMI achieve its goal of a full, robust and secure presence in Iraq. Multinational forces — notably, the Georgian, Romanian and South Korean contingents — continue to provide security for the United Nations in Baghdad, Basra and Irbil, respectively. Those troops provide static site security, reconnaissance, security patrols, convoy escorts, checkpoints and, when necessary, medical and emergency evacuation. Under a separate United Nations agreement, Fijian troops also provide static and close-in protection for United Nations personnel and facilities in Baghdad.

The United Nations Trust Fund to Support the Distinct Entity Created to Provide Security for the United Nations Presence in Iraq, which covers "middle ring" security expenses, is facing dwindling resources. Contributions to the Fund are necessary to ensure the continued critical support provided by the middle ring security forces for the United Nations Mission in Iraq. We call on Member States to consider contributing.

The Iraqi Government remains engaged in efforts to build positive relations with its neighbours. Over the last three months, Syria and Iraq have reopened their embassies in each other's capitals, and Iraq has re-established its embassy in Saudi Arabia. The Iraqi Government also invited its neighbours Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait — as well as Bahrain, Egypt, the five permanent members of the Security Council and the United Nations — to a meeting in Baghdad on 10 March. At that meeting all attendees announced their support for Iraqi security and stability.

The Iraqi Government is continuing its efforts to secure a stable future for Iraq's citizens. Further progress in the political, economic and security arenas is essential to helping Iraq achieve its goals. The continued support of the international community remains important to Iraq's efforts, rooted in respect for Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi, Vice-President of Iraq.

Mr. Abdal Mahdi (Iraq) (*spoke in Arabic*): First of all, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this meeting. I would also like to express our appreciation for the two briefings we have heard, by Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and by Mr. Alejandro Wolff, the representative of the United States speaking on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq.

The political and constitutional process in Iraq came to a conclusion in 2006, in accordance with the provisions of resolution 1546 (2004). We hope that 2007 will be a decisive and very important year as regards the reorganization of the Iraqi State, the revival of a sense of national belonging and the achievement of civil peace. In order to meet those aims, the

Government of national unity will focus on three complementary aspects: security, the political area, and economic aspects.

With regard to security, the Iraqi Government has redoubled its efforts to combat terrorist, insurgent and criminal movements, sectarian violence and militias. With the assistance of the Multinational Force in Iraq, the Government has adopted a security plan for Baghdad called "Operation Imposing Law" in the context of a comprehensive plan whose outcome will be to ensure that Iraqi security forces assume responsibility for security throughout the country by the end of 2007. However, while we do not want to be overly optimistic, some positive results have already been achieved in the area of security. That is evidenced by the marked reduction in the number of terrorist operations, the level of insurgency and sectarian violence. Although those developments have fallen short of our expectations and ambitions, the Iraqi people have begun to feel their results.

On the political front, the Government of Iraq has adopted reconciliation as a strategic option. The results to be achieved by following that option will have an impact upon the attainment of security throughout the country. In that connection, we have held numerous conferences and meetings at the national level that have brought together the various religious faiths and tribal groups. In January 2006, the Prime Minister presided over a meeting of political parties and powers. At the beginning of this month, a reconciliation conference for officers of the former Iraqi army was held. The Government of Iraq is striving to broaden the national reconciliation process to include parties and groups that are not in the Government.

On the economic front, the Iraqi Parliament has adopted a budget for 2007. Investment expenditures account for about $10 billion of that budget. We also plan to double allocations to the two most important sectors, namely, education and health. Forecasts predict that the new budget will make it possible to create more than 135,000 new jobs. That will in turn contribute to reducing the level of unemployment, thereby producing a positive impact on security. In addition, the Government has introduced the oil and gas law for consideration and adoption by the Iraqi Parliament. The adoption of the new budget and the draft oil and gas law will give new impetus to the Iraqi economy, which will in turn have a positive impact on the services sector.

Nevertheless, Iraq cannot develop its economy by itself and requires international assistance to consolidate its development on a solid basis. That is why we hope to receive international assistance in rebuilding Iraq.

Two significant events will take place this month. Tomorrow, at United Nations Headquarters here in New York, a meeting will be held under the auspices of the Secretary-General to promote the International Compact with Iraq, an initiative that was launched by the Government of Iraq to forge a partnership with the international community with the aim of furthering economic, political and social development in Iraq over the next five years. We hope that at tomorrow's meeting we will be able to set a time and place for the final ratification the International Compact.

At the request of the Government of Iraq, the fifth meeting of the donors to the International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq (IRFFI) will be held on 19 March in Istanbul, Turkey. While we look forward to the success of those meetings, we hope that donors will demonstrate a greater commitment to the process of rebuilding Iraq.

The new Iraq will regain its stability, be reborn and relaunch its development only if it has the support of neighbouring countries. Iraqi diplomacy has striven mightily in recent months to organize bilateral and multilateral meetings in order to bring Iraq's neighbours to a meeting in Baghdad. Those efforts have born fruit, resulting in a meeting held on 10 March in Baghdad. We hope that the results of the conference will help us to enhance stability and security in Iraq so as to prevent any interference in its domestic affairs. In spite of the difficult conditions in Iraq and the great challenge with which it is faced, my country has demonstrated its ability to assist its neighbours in turn by fostering dialogue and promoting negotiations between large nations and neighbouring countries, thereby reducing tensions in the region and preventing an upsurge in violence.

As a result of security conditions and the efforts of terrorists to provoke civil strife and ignite civil war, Iraq has witnessed a large-scale internal and external displacement of individuals. In the context of the Baghdad security plan, the Iraqi authorities have sought to provide security so as to ensure that internally displaced families are able to return to their homes. This, in fact, has begun to happen, and

hundreds of families have returned to their homes. The number of returning families will rise as long as the security plan is able to meet all of its objectives, as we hope and expect it to do.

The International Organization for Migration and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimate that the number of refugees currently stands at some 2 million, the majority of whom are located in two neighbouring countries, Jordan and Syria. The presence of those Iraqis in the two countries is long-standing in certain cases, due to the former dictatorial regime, and has recently been augmented by the current precarious security conditions in Iraq. It is believed that most of the families will be able to return home once security conditions have improved, and the Iraqi Government is working to ensure that that will indeed be the case.

The most recent meeting of neighbouring countries, held on 10 March, allowed us to establish a joint commission between Iraq and other countries that are interested in resolving the problem. We are fully aware of the burden being borne by our two brotherly countries, yet we hope that the Iraqi refugees will be treated humanely and in accordance with international law and international agreements. We also hope that they will be granted legal residency and receive adequate assistance until they return home.

We take this opportunity to thank those two brotherly countries, as well as all others that have assisted Iraqi refugees in these difficult times. We hope that international organizations, and the UNHCR above all, will fulfil their obligations in this regard. We welcome announcement that the High Commissioner has organized an international conference for 17 and 18 April and hope that it will allow us to put an end to the suffering of the Iraqi refugees.

Finally, allow me on behalf of the people and Government of Iraq to express our deep appreciation for the efforts undertaken by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and Mr. Qazi, whether in the political realm in the context of national reconciliation efforts; or the constitutional realm, by providing an appropriate climate for the work of the Constitutional Review Committee; or the electoral realm, by providing assistance in the formation of the supreme electoral commission and the municipal electoral commission; or in the reconstruction of Iraq. We appreciate the role being played by the Special Representative and hope that the United Nations will be able to play an even greater role in Iraq. The Iraqi Government will provide all possible support to ensure that it does.

Once the security situation has improved, we will call for the return of United Nations agencies currently based outside Iraq and ensure that they are able to resume their activities and fulfil their obligations throughout my country. While we highly value the role played by UNAMI, we should like to remind the members of the Security Council that Iraq still struggles under the burdens of other mandates for which there is no longer any justification inasmuch as the conditions that led to their creation no longer exist. I am referring to the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC).

We also wish to thank the Multinational Force in Iraq for the role that it has played in helping the Iraqi forces provide security for the Iraqi people. Like many others, including members of the Security Council, it is our opinion that the termination or review of the aforementioned Commission's mandate is both desirable and required.

Mr. Biabaroh-Iboro (Congo) (*spoke in French*): My delegation thanks you, Mr. President, for having organized this timely debate on the situation in Iraq in the presence of His Excellency Vice-President Abdal Mahdi, whom we welcome. We listened to his briefing with attention and great interest. We thank the Secretary-General for the detailed and concise report presented by Mr. Qazi. Our thanks go also to the representative of the United States of America for his briefing.

The situation in Iraq remains very grave. The level of violence reached in the country continues to be worrisome in many respects. At the national level, that violence, while hampering all national reconstruction efforts based on the International Compact with Iraq, is helping to exacerbate political and religious tensions, posing enormous risks for Iraq's unity and territorial integrity. At the regional level, it is an element of strong destabilization in a region already beset by great social and political tensions. At the international level, violence is undermining the assistance efforts agreed upon by the international community, particularly through the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq and the Multinational Force.

We firmly condemn this orgy of violence. We believe that nothing can stop its devastating effects unless the Iraqi political class comes to its senses and all types of external interference in Iraqi affairs cease.

The impossibility of a military solution to the Iraq crisis becomes more obvious every day. Only an inclusive and responsible dialogue will make it possible to address the many challenges facing Iraqi society. My delegation calls for the organization of such a dialogue, which would lead to national reconciliation on the basis of the following concerns: equitable sharing of national resources and wealth; realistic power-sharing; the establishment of reliable security forces that can eventually replace foreign forces; the dismantling of sectarian militias, other armed groups and the flow of weapons into Iraq; consideration of the question of refugees and internally displaced persons; the establishment of a system for human rights protection and a reliable judicial system; and, finally, respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq.

Of course, it is up to the Iraqi Government to create the conditions for such an approach. However, the role of the international community and of all interested parties is essential. In that connection, my delegation supports the various initiatives under way to reduce the violence and stabilize the situation in Iraq. The holding of a conference on Iraqi security on 10 March 2007 in Baghdad is an encouraging first step in terms of the participation that it attracted, as is the decision to establish three joint committees responsible for issues related to security, refugees and petroleum.

Thus, we welcome the recognition of the need to involve all of Iraq's neighbours in any initiative to stabilize the situation in the country and beyond, throughout the Middle East. We look forward with interest to the announced holding of a conference at the ministerial level to provide follow-up to the Baghdad talks.

All of this activity, if carried out with patience and determination on the basis of the objectives I have mentioned, should certainly help to reduce the violence and to stabilize the country.

Mr. Suescum (Panama) (*spoke in Spanish*): We wish at the outset to thank Mr. Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and the representative of the United States for their briefings. We also wish to welcome His Excellency Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi and to thank him for the information he has provided today.

We are concerned about the serious security situation in Iraq, not only because of its obvious tragic effects on human lives, but also because of its consequences for, inter alia, the country's political life, the humanitarian and social situation, the provision of public services, job creation and access to health services. As we have stated in other forums, the solution of those problems requires a strong component of political dialogue and measures at the regional and international levels.

The worrisome humanitarian situation provides a clear example of the regional effects of the situation in Iraq. According to Red Cross data, there are approximately 2 million Iraqi refugees in the neighbouring countries. That underscores the importance of regional cooperation to resolve the humanitarian situation and of efforts such as those undertaken by countries such as Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic. In that connection, we agree with the Secretary-General regarding the importance of the outcome of the conference of Iraq's neighbours. It is important that peoples with such diverse interests, but also with so much in common, take joint action to make progress in stabilizing Iraq and thus the region.

A particularly worrisome aspect of the displacement of refugees is the information, provided in the report, that it has a strong ethnic and sectarian component. We believe it is essential that the efforts of Iraqi actors, the United Nations, the Security Council and regional actors be aimed at achieving national unity in Iraq.

The conference of Iraq's neighbours must give the necessary impetus to initiatives such as the International Compact with Iraq. We also commend United Nations efforts in endeavours such as those supporting the Independent High Electoral Commission in Iraq. It is within Iraq itself and at its initiative that the most important steps will be taken and the most significant progress will be made towards political life and an inclusive society.

We wish to emphasize the importance that we attach — as does the Secretary-General in his report — to the efforts to resolve differences through the path of dialogue and the protection of human dignity. The Secretary-General's report gives us reason to believe that, with the participation of the Iraqi leaders and the

international and regional communities, we can meet these challenges, and more, in order to achieve a united and peaceful Iraq.

Mr. Al-Bader (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): At the outset, Mr. President, I would like to thank you for convening this important meeting. We welcome the participation of His Excellency Mr. Abdal Mahdi, Vice-President of the Republic of Iraq. Allow me as well to thank Mr. Ashraf Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq and His Excellency Mr. Alejandro Wolff, representative of the United States, for their briefings to the Security Council.

The place that brotherly Iraq occupies in our hearts and minds does not need to be emphasized from this rostrum. Iraq is a highly important country in our region and one that enjoys considerable weight. We in the State of Qatar are pained to see the suffering of our brothers in Iraq, and it is not surprising that we continue to appeal to all our Iraqi brothers throughout the spectrum to put their national interests ahead of other considerations. Political solutions to the current problem cannot be imported from abroad. Rather, they are available in the hands of Iraqis themselves, when intentions are good and when these intentions are translated into deeds on the ground.

The international community's support for the efforts to achieve peace, security and development in Iraq is very important to help extricate Iraq from the crisis that threatens its unity and stability. In this context, the International Compact with Iraq is a useful initiative to consolidate peace and pursue the process of economic, political and social development in Iraq over the next five years. The meeting to be held here at the United Nations Headquarters tomorrow morning will be an opportunity to stress the importance of that initiative. In order to realize the vision of the Compact, it is important that support by the United Nations and international partners be coordinated for the implementation of the commitments made in the Compact.

To overcome the deteriorating humanitarian situation, the speedy improvement of the living conditions of the Iraqi people is no less important than the national reconciliation process in order to ensure stability in Iraq.

The humanitarian situation in Iraq continues to deteriorate. The crisis of Iraqi refugees has become a real crisis of major proportions. The enormity of the humanitarian disaster in Iraq calls for exerting all efforts by international partners, the United Nations intergovernmental institutions and other international bodies, so as to alleviate the humanitarian crisis. In this regard, we hope that the conference to be convened by the Office of the High Commissioner for Refugees next month in Geneva, which will deal with the humanitarian needs of displaced Iraqis, would contribute to raising awareness of the need to support these displaced people as well as their host countries, which bear great burdens because of this situation.

The State of Qatar has constantly stressed the need to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Iraq and to restore security and freedom to the Iraqi people. We also stress that the root causes of the Iraqi crisis must be identified in order to find a solution.

The way out of the Iraqi crisis starts with focusing our attention on the elements of the political process in Iraq, not on a military solution, and on encouraging all groups to integrate into political life and to combat sectarianism. The role of wise leadership is crucial in this regard inasmuch as that leaders of Iraq's sects must mobilize in order to heal the rift in their country.

Although the serious security conditions in Iraq restrict the work of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI), the Mission continues to contribute effectively in such areas as constitutional support, electoral assistance, reconstruction, development, humanitarian assistance, human rights and the rule of law, with a view to restoring stability, security and prosperity in Iraq.

Mr. Burian (Slovakia): At the outset, I would like to join the previous speakers in thanking the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Qazi, for his briefing and for introducing the current report of the Secretary-General on the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI). I wish to take this opportunity to commend him in person, as well as all UNAMI staff for the outstanding work they are doing in and for Iraq under really difficult and challenging circumstances.

I also thank Mr. Wolff for his report on behalf of the countries making up the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I), including my own country, Slovakia. We welcome the presence of the Vice-President of Iraq, Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi, at our meeting and we thank him for his statement.

As we have heard in the briefing, the security situation in Iraq remains precarious and highly complex. The challenges for political and economic consolidation and reconstruction are mounting. This situation has an immensely adverse impact on the daily life of the Iraqi people and on the ability of the Government of Iraq to deliver essential services to them. All this is overshadowing the ongoing efforts and achievements in building democratic institutions. In this regard, we believe that it is crucial for Iraq and for the international community to mobilize all efforts to reverse these trends and to prevent the country from slipping to an even deeper internal conflict and sectarian violence, with the potential to destabilize the whole region.

Iraqi ownership of these efforts and processes is crucial for achieving a lasting and sustainable solution and the stabilization of the country. The Secretary-General rightly states in his report that "[o]nly the Iraqi people themselves can determine their common destiny and agree upon the structure of the Iraqi State". (S/2007/126, para. 61).

Indeed, during the past almost four years, the people and the leadership of Iraq have many times clearly demonstrated their commitment to and support for Iraq's transition and stabilization. They have made numerous sacrifices to this end, and we believe that there is enough political will and potential to achieve a negotiated political settlement and build a stable and prosperous Iraq, living in peace with itself and its neighbours.

In this respect, we consider the overall improvement of the security and humanitarian situation and the promotion of national reconciliation, human rights and economic and social welfare to be the key to peacebuilding in Iraq. Developing fully inclusive political processes and dialogue and fostering consensus, mutual respect and compromise is the only way, in our view, to stop the increasing violence and sectarian strife.

The country must achieve further progress in building democratic institutions based on the principles of fair distribution of power and equitable sharing of national resources. In this regard, we remain convinced that a genuine constitutional review process, a review of the de-Baathification process and finalizing legislation on provincial elections represent important confidence-building measures that can help Iraq to tackle its many challenges. Last but not least, all efforts should be undertaken to address the increasing humanitarian suffering of a large number of refugees and internally displaced persons.

We share the view that the strong involvement of the United Nations in Iraq's transition and stabilization processes remains instrumental. We therefore support the active engagement and role of the United Nations in developing the International Compact with Iraq. Along with the European Union, Slovakia expresses its readiness to participate actively and constructively in this process. In this regard, we welcome the recent finalization of documentation resulting from the preparatory activities for the International Compact. We are looking forward to tomorrow's meeting on the Compact to be convened by the Secretary-General and to the briefing by Iraqi Deputy Prime Minister Saleh on the latest developments and progress in the implementation of commitments under the framework of the ICI.

We also welcome and support Iraq's efforts and initiatives aimed at promoting a greater and stronger regional dialogue. We maintain that regional actors, mainly Iraq's immediate neighbours, can and should play a more active role in promoting Iraq's peace and stability, which would benefit not only that country but also its neighbours, as well as the wider region. Their contribution to the success of Iraq's stabilization therefore remains vital. In that regard, we welcome the holding and the outcomes of the conference held last weekend in Baghdad, which managed to bring together, in a constructive manner, Iraq's neighbours and regional and international players. That was an important first step, and we hope and expect that all involved parties will now swiftly build on that positive encounter and endorse further practical steps to promote Iraq's stability and security.

Mr. Mantovani (Italy): Let me first of all join my colleagues in welcoming the Vice-President of the Republic of Iraq, Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi. I listened very attentively to his remarks, which I believe gave us all important elements to consider. I should like also to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Ambassador Qazi, and the chargé d'affaires of the United States, Ambassador Wolff, for their informative and very interesting and exhaustive briefings today.

I wish also to take this opportunity, as this is Italy's first statement in the Council on this subject, to commend the important role that the United Nations, through the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), is playing in contributing to the reconstruction and stabilization of the country.

We are well aware of the limits to United Nations action emanating from the security situation, and we truly appreciate the risks run by United Nations personnel — both international and local staff — every day in their work. We believe that the United Nations presence in Iraq is of fundamental importance, and we hope that conditions in Iraq will allow for its growth.

Let me convey our sincere congratulations to the Iraqi Government on the success of the Iraqi initiative to convene the 10 March meeting in Baghdad. That was definitely a meaningful event in terms of the promotion of stability in Iraq, and we hope that it will mark a turning point on the road to the true pacification of the country. We deem it of the utmost importance that neighbouring countries fully play their role in actively supporting the new Iraq. But, since the exercise is aimed at garnering broad regional and international consensus, we believe it appropriate that the follow-up of the meeting, particularly at the ministerial level, be extended to other countries that are particularly involved, such as, for instance, the Group of Eight (G-8) countries.

At the national level, I wish to reiterate that Italy is ready to make its contribution, as it has already done as a member of the Preparatory Group for the International Compact, to all initiatives and in all political forums deemed useful by the Iraqi Government.

The current situation in Iraq, despite renewed efforts by the Multinational Force and the Iraqi security forces, remains quite sensitive. The violent sectarian conflict between Sunni and Shiite extremists, ably exploited and fomented by Al-Qaida terrorists and foreign agents who want to keep the country in a state of chaos, hinders the efforts of the Iraqi Government to achieve national reconciliation.

Although international support is critical to the successful stabilization of Iraq, it is clear to us that the key to success lies, ultimately, in the hands of the Iraqi Government and people. In that framework, Italy has repeatedly underscored to the Iraqi leadership, and most recently to Foreign Minister Zebari, that a political process of national dialogue and reconciliation is needed for the stabilization of the country. In that context, we hope that the Iraqi Government will adopt effective and immediate measures to foster the goal of national reconciliation. Among those measures I would recall the drafting of a new law on de-Ba'athification and on the reinsertion of members of the former Iraqi army who were not implicated in any crime into the new security forces. It is now more crucial than ever that the Iraqi Government adopt those measures, as announced, without delay, and that it provide for a general amnesty for those members of armed groups who disband and disarm.

In the framework of the political process to which I have just referred, we believe that, as has been stated on several occasions by the Secretary-General and by Ambassador Qazi, the review of the Constitution is of the utmost importance. Concrete economic development measures, including measures aimed at the development of the private sector, are also needed. The approval of the hydrocarbon law and, more generally, the revision of the management of natural resources in the federal framework, which is linked to the constitutional review, are also fundamental steps.

At the national level, Italy is increasingly involved in helping to reconstruct Iraq. Since 2003, Italy has contributed, through projects and actions, more than €240 million to international efforts in the civilian area. As proof of our desire to step up our support for the reconstruction of Iraq, on 23 January in Rome we signed a bilateral friendship, partnership and cooperation agreement that set out guidelines for building a privileged relationship between our two countries. Italy has pledged assistance credits of up to €400 million over three years.

Italy, also as a member of the Preparatory Group, is supporting resolutely the process of the International Compact with Iraq. By taking into account the economic, political and security aspects, the Compact may prove to be a significant tool available to the Iraqi Government for the stabilization and reconstruction of the country. It is fundamental, however, that the Iraqi authorities actually implement the measures indicated in the final report.

In that respect, I wish to welcome the initiative of the Secretary-General to convene tomorrow's high-level meeting on the International Compact, at which Italy will be represented by its Deputy Minister for

Foreign Affairs, Mr. Intini. We sincerely hope that, also thanks to tomorrow's meeting, we will soon be able to witness the official launch of the Compact.

Mr. Shcherbak (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): We are grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Qazi, for his briefing, and for having presented the report of the Secretary-General on the activities of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). He has given us an objective picture of the extremely difficult situation that the State of Iraq now finds itself in. Once again, we express our profound gratitude to Mr. Qazi and to the staff of UNAMI for their very important work, which is being carried out in an extremely difficult military and political context.

We welcome the presence in this Chamber of the Vice-President of Iraq, Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi, and we express our solidarity with all of the Iraqi people, who are now living through one of the most difficult periods in their history.

We express our condolences to the families and friends of those Iraqis who have died as a result of terrorist acts or who have been victims of ethnic or sectarian conflict.

The Secretary-General's report and Mr. Qazi's briefing gave further details on the specific characteristics of the crisis that is gripping Iraq today. They include high levels of terrorist and insurgent activity, the disastrous condition of the civilian infrastructure, and the increasingly tragic situation of refugees, internally displaced persons and professional groups in the country.

The human rights situation in Iraq is also unsatisfactory. The new Baghdad security plan, intended to stabilize the situation in the capital, has not yet yielded any significant results. Substantive talks have not yet begun on a timetable for the withdrawal of foreign troops from Iraq.

The Russian delegation supports the recommendations of the Secretary-General with regard to ways and means to settle the problem in Kirkuk.

We attach importance to the chapter dealing with the work being carried out with respect to the hydrocarbon law, and we share the view of the Secretary-General that that document should ensure equal access by all Iraqi communities to the country's national resources and provide a mechanism that guarantees its territorial integrity.

We earnestly hope that that law will include provisions making it possible for many companies throughout the world to work on an equal and non-discriminatory basis — including Russian companies, which have considerable experience in the oil and gas sector in Iraq and in its hydrocarbon market.

At the same time, we would like to point out that Russian companies are ready to take part in the rebuilding of the Iraqi economy and the further development of the country.

The Russian delegation notes the importance of the international meeting held recently in Baghdad at the initiative of the Iraqi Government, with the participation of the five permanent members of the Security Council, Iraq's neighbours and interested regional organizations. The Russian Federation took part in that important event and welcomed its outcome. We have always stressed the need for the close coordination of the international community's efforts in Iraq and have advocated collective efforts to find a way to overcome the crisis in that country. We have supported, and will continue to support, all ideas and proposals that are consistent with such an approach. It is our hope that, following the Baghdad meeting, there will be an international meeting with wider scope at the level of ministers for foreign affairs.

The Russian Federation intends to continue to take an active part in all significant multilateral activities with regard to Iraq. We hope that such activities will truly influence the future development of events in that country and help the Iraqi people to achieve national reconciliation through broad dialogue involving all national patriotic forces and to put an end to the violence and the bloodshed. Such an approach should be taken by all responsible parties that wish to see the lasting normalization of the situation in Iraq and are able to assist in the settlement process. For its part, Russia is ready to assist in any way that it can.

Mr. Kleib (Indonesia): I would like to begin by extending the gratitude of my delegation to the Secretary-General for his report (S/2007/126). We are also very grateful to the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Ashraf Qazi, for his tireless efforts in ensuring the effective contribution of the United Nations to peace and reconstruction in Iraq.

My delegation would also like to welcome His Excellency Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi, Vice-President of Iraq, to this meeting.

My delegation is very concerned about the continuing violence, which results in human casualties on an almost daily basis and is overshadowing political and reconstruction efforts in Iraq. The deteriorating situation caused by that violence has affected, in a harmful way, the ability of many Iraqis to enjoy their basic rights. In this regard, we welcome Prime Minister Al-Maliki's new plan to deal with all armed groups, regardless of religious or political affiliations, combined with border reconciliation and economic measures. Despite many challenges to the implementation of the new plan, my delegation is hopeful that it will bring tangible results, not only in Baghdad, but also in the rest of Iraq.

Iraq is part of the family of nations. Thus, the international community simply cannot stand idly by. We must do our utmost to help to alleviate the suffering of the Iraqis and to restore Iraq's sovereignty, peace and stability.

Last year, President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono put forward a proposal to promote the early resolution of conflict in Iraq, which consists of three elements: first, all-inclusive reconciliation among Iraqis, involving the current Government; secondly, the participation of the international community in reconstruction and rehabilitation efforts in the country; and, thirdly, the deployment of United Nations-mandated peacekeeping forces in Iraq after the withdrawal of foreign troops.

As regards reconciliation among Iraqis, my delegation believes that settling differences among all parties in the country is a matter of urgency. The key to such reconciliation is genuine dialogue across and among ethnic and religious groups. Dialogue will be robust when moderates are empowered and have more room and a greater capacity to set the agenda of Iraqi politics and to have a tangible impact on the process. Thus, we commend Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani's fatwa calling for unity and coexistence based on mutual respect, as well as the formation of joint Sunni and Shiite committees in mixed neighbourhoods in the country. We are hopeful that more initiatives of that kind will proliferate, given their significance for the enhancement of confidence-building efforts.

For our part, my delegation is pleased to inform the Council that, in cooperation with the two largest Muslim organizations in Indonesia, namely, Nahdhatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah, an international conference among Islamic religious leaders for reconciliation in Iraq is to be convened in Indonesia from 2 to 3 April 2007. The conference is expected to agree on concrete actions that will strengthen the reconciliation process in Iraq.

With regard to reconstruction and rehabilitation, my delegation attaches great importance to the completion of those activities so that the Iraqi people can enjoy their social and economic rights to the fullest. Thus, we commend the hard work of the Iraqi Government to ensure the realization of those rights.

Given current conditions, however, Iraq cannot do it alone. Support from the international community remains instrumental for building the capacity of the Iraqi Government to meet various socio-economic challenges. My delegation welcomed the launch of the International Compact for Iraq. We fully support the partnership between the Government with Iraq and the United Nations in the preparations for and the management of the Compact.

We are greatly concerned about the continuing violence and attacks aimed at destabilizing Iraq. There must be reasons for the continuation of such heinous actions, and we cannot ignore the possibility that hostile forces in Iraq have emerged as a direct result of the prolonged presence of foreign forces in that country.

My delegation has always believed that a clear timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces must be urgently sought, based upon a sovereign decision by Iraq, without creating a vacuum which could put Iraq in a more difficult situation. Such a time-bound exit strategy should, indeed, consider the requirements of sufficient capacity on the part of the Iraqis, so that they can be self-reliant in terms of security and economic development, and the existence of national unity based on genuine political dialogue and all-inclusive national reconciliation.

In the meantime, considering the cross-border characteristics of the Iraqi conflict, my delegation believes that countries in the region can play an important role in contributing to the promotion of peace and stability in Iraq and in preventing regional ramifications.

In that regard, we welcome the recent conference in Baghdad, which involved representatives from key countries in the region. The conference was an opportunity for diverse perspectives to constructively converge in support of the people and the Government of Iraq in their exertions to achieve economic progress, as well as durable peace and stability through national reconciliation.

As regards the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI), my delegation wishes to reaffirm its support for the Mission. We fully support the development of UNAMI's operational capacity with a view to its becoming a self-reliant Mission. We also attach great significance to the continuation of a trust fund to support the operation of an entity that provides security for the United Nations presence in Iraq.

As a final point, my delegation emphasizes the importance of collaboration among UNAMI, agencies and refugee-hosting countries in addressing the Iraqi humanitarian issue. With 2 million Iraqi refugees in neighbouring countries and 1.9 million displaced inside Iraq, UNAMI absolutely cannot address this issue alone. Partnership is indispensable in that regard.

Mr. Verbeke (Belgium) (*spoke in French*): I should like first of all to say how honoured my delegation is by the presence among us of the Vice-President of Iraq, Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi. I would also like to thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Qazi, for his briefing to the Council, and Ambassador Wolfe for the statement that he made on behalf of the Multinational Force.

Belgium shares the concern of the Secretary-General as regards the danger that the violence in Iraq poses to its society, institutions and political process — all of which are still fragile.

We welcome the renewed efforts of the Iraqi Government to meet the first obligation of any State under the rule of law, namely, to ensure the security of its citizens and full respect for their basic rights. However, we are all aware that an approach based solely on security will not provide long-term stability for Iraq. It is for that reason that Belgium supports the appeal of the Secretary-General for heightened dialogue at the national, regional and international levels.

Belgium has always emphasized the importance of promoting inclusiveness in the political process in Iraq. We hope that the adoption at the end of February by the Council of Ministers of the draft law on hydrocarbons will be the first step in that direction.

In addition, Belgium encourages Iraq and its neighbours to expand their dialogue. Given the high numbers of refugees, it is clear that the Iraqi authorities are not the only ones suffering as a result of the deteriorating situation in Iraq; nor are they the only ones in a position to rectify the situation. It is therefore by working together that Iraq and its neighbours must resolve the problem — at least in part — so as to be able to work towards the stabilization of both Iraq and the entire region.

Belgium supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Special Representative to promote regional dialogue. We also welcome the meeting held last weekend in Baghdad at the initiative of the Government of Iraq. We hope that those various contacts will soon be followed by specific commitments that make a constructive contribution to stabilizing Iraq.

With regard to the part to be played by the international community, we believe its role should be a dual one: to lend its full political support to efforts aimed at the reconciliation and stabilization of Iraq and to demonstrate our solidarity with the people of Iraq through specific actions.

There will be two opportunities in the near future for Belgium and the international community to reaffirm their cooperation with Iraq. In April there will be a welcome initiative by Mr. António Guterres, High Commissioner for Refugees, to convene an international ministerial conference to raise awareness about, and meet, the urgent humanitarian needs of the many Iraqis who continue to flee from violence. And, beginning tomorrow, a meeting will be held where the Government of Iraq will present the latest developments in the implementation of the commitments made as part of the International Compact with Iraq. Belgium believes that the Compact is an opportunity to renew the partnership between the international community and Iraq, as well as a chance to remobilize efforts to rebuild Iraq. The Compact should also provide for broader international support for the Government of Iraq. However, security and national reconciliation continue to be prerequisites for Iraq's reconstruction.

Mr. Christian (Ghana): Allow me to thank you, Mr. President, for organizing this debate, as well as to express my appreciation to Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, for his comprehensive briefing on the situation in Iraq.

We would like to recognize the presence here today of Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi, Vice-President of Iraq.

My delegation welcomes the initiative of the Government of Iraq to convene an international meeting in Baghdad on 10 March 2007, which deliberated on ways to restore stability in Iraq. At that constructive meeting, it was decided to set up committees to discuss issues pertaining to security, refugees and energy supplies. That should be the beginning of further coordinated efforts at the regional and international levels to assist Iraq.

We are encouraged that preparatory activities for the International Compact with Iraq have continued, resulting in the finalization of documentation. We look forward to the meeting to be held on Friday, 16 March, to review the substantive progress made in the development of the Compact. We share the Secretary-General's assessment that positive political progress and a reduction in violence in Iraq are essential preconditions for the success of that initiative.

The United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) Office of Constitutional Support should be commended for its continued assistance to the Constitutional Review Committee of the Council of Representatives in its conduct of the comprehensive review of the Iraqi Constitution. In addition to facilitating substantive dialogue among members of the Committee and strengthening the Committee's outreach capacity to civil society during the constitutional review process, UNAMI and the Committee agreed on a defined programme of support. Beyond those activities, the study tours arranged by the Office for members of the Constitutional Review Committee enabled them to profit from the experience of countries with federal arrangements.

The report of the Secretary-General (S/2007/126) informs us that UNAMI has continued its engagement with the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq and has undertaken a comprehensive capacity-building assessment of the institution, which should form the framework for the planning of activities of the UNAMI Electoral Assistance Office for the first half of 2007. In that regard, we note UNAMI's pledge to assist the Independent High Electoral Commission of Iraq to meet the significant challenges that remain in preparation for future electoral events in Iraq by supporting the drafting of legislation, developing a governorate-level electoral capacity, advising on electoral systems and developing a credible list of voters.

The worsening humanitarian and human rights situation in Iraq should be of serious concern to us. Two million refugees are reported to be in neighbouring countries, with a nearly equal number displaced inside Iraq. Given the dire circumstances of those unfortunate victims of civil strife and sectarian violence, the urgency for the international community to address that crisis cannot be overemphasized. We urge the international community to support efforts by the United Nations to assist those in need.

The United Nations presence and activities in Iraq continue to be severely limited by the prevailing security situation. It is to the credit of UNAMI that mitigation measures in place within the international zone and the security precautions taken during visits to other parts of Baghdad have reduced the overall risk to United Nations staff. We acknowledge the contribution of Member States that provide logistic and protection support to the United Nations presence in Iraq. However, the Trust Fund established in 2004 to support the United Nations distinct entity, in accordance with resolution 1546 (2004), will be exhausted this month. We join the Secretary-General in requesting that fresh financial contributions are made to the Trust Fund to ensure that the middle-ring force is well-resourced in the future.

Mr. De La Sablière (France) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like to welcome the presence in the Council of Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi, Vice-President of the Republic of Iraq. I also wish to thank Mr. Qazi and the delegation of the United States for their briefings.

Allow me to make the following comments.

First, as others who have spoken before me have said, the situation in Iraq continues to be very serious — as regards security, for instance. The report issued last January by the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) listed a total of 35,000 civilian deaths in 2006 — or about 100 persons daily — and more than 36,000 injured. In today's report (S/2007/126), the Secretary-General states that,

despite a brief improvement in the situation, an atmosphere of serious violence continues to prevail in Iraq. That violence is characterized by the continuation of especially deadly and barbarous attacks, to which the Security Council reacted publicly on 22 February.

With regard to the humanitarian situation, the Secretary-General has already alerted the Council to the issue of displaced persons. Today there is a record 2 million displaced persons in neighbouring countries, with 1.9 million internally displaced in Iraq itself. The Secretary-General goes even further, stating that this crisis "has the potential of turning into a full-scale humanitarian emergency" (*S/2007/126, para. 30*). As far as I know, this is the first time that phrase has been used. I would therefore be grateful to the Secretariat for an explanation as to what it means, and its significance for the United Nations if the assessment is borne out.

Given the situation and the urgent need to halt the deterioration, France notes the importance of re-establishing a true political perspective through action on several levels. First, at the internal level, we must support genuine national reconciliation, the key to the country's unity and stability, in the framework of an inclusive process involving all elements of Iraqi society. At the regional level, we should follow the example of what was done at Sharm el-Sheikh in 2004 by strengthening dialogue among the neighbouring countries, which have an important role to play in contributing to stability and maintaining Iraq's territorial integrity. At the international level, we should set a clear timetable for the withdrawal of foreign forces so as to allow the Iraqis to recover their full sovereignty, assume all their responsibilities and promote a national consensus.

France has also sought to play its part in the humanitarian effort by contributing to the programme of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and by actively supporting the non-governmental organizations that continue to do outstanding work in Iraq. In that context, the French authorities have naturally followed with great interest the ideas that have been mooted and initiatives undertaken, especially since the beginning of the year, at the levels cited earlier.

Within Iraq itself, the Government has affirmed its intention of pursuing national reconciliation, in particular in the political and legislative contexts. At the regional level, on 10 March a preparatory meeting was held for a forthcoming conference of Iraq's neighbours, bringing to Baghdad the neighbouring countries and representatives of the international community, including of permanent members of this Council. At the international level, in the framework of the new American strategy, a transfer to the Iraqi authorities of competencies for security throughout the territory has been scheduled to take place by the end of the year. Finally, the gravity of the humanitarian situation in Iraq has been acknowledged and the international community is increasingly responding to it.

My country naturally hopes that those new developments will guide Iraq towards a new dynamic of peace and stability. It is in the interests of the Iraqi authorities to spare no effort in that regard, just as it is in our collective interest to assist them. In that regard, and in conclusion, my delegation can only fully endorse the recommendations of the Secretary-General by recalling that there is no alternative to a political solution and that Iraq's leaders now have no choice but to seek a negotiated settlement amongst themselves if they do not wish to find themselves engulfed in civil war; by calling on the regional actors to play their role to the full in promoting unity and stability in Iraq, which will in turn strengthen their own security; and by calling on the international community to stand with Iraq, promote the full restoration of its sovereignty, and support the United Nations efforts to reverse the deterioration of the humanitarian situation.

Mr. Voto-Bernales (Peru) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, I welcome the Vice-President of Iraq, Mr. Adil Abdal Mahdi. I also thank the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, Mr. Ashraf Qazi, for his briefing, and the representative of the United States for his report on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq.

The circumstances in which we meet today are ones of serious insecurity and instability in Iraq, as the Secretary-General's report illustrates yet again, unfortunately. Sectarian violence has intensified after an initial decline following the implementation of the Baghdad security plan. The specific consequences of the security plan therefore remain to be seen in the coming weeks. Moreover, reconciliation appears to be remote, reconstruction is bogged down, and the impact of conflict is reflected in tragic statistics, such as the nearly 4 million individuals who have become refugees

and internally displaced persons, and the fact that only 50 per cent of school-age children are currently attending schools. Those facts bode ill for the future of the country.

It is necessary to continue to adapt strategies for security, political dialogue, humanitarian assistance and development to the circumstances of ongoing sectarian conflict. We hope that the gravity of the situation will generate among those Iraqis who aspire to a future for their own country a gradual mobilization towards re-opening dialogue in their country in order to address the most basic issues affecting everyone's existence. Clearly, significant changes must be made with regard to strategic orientation and the provision of the resources necessary to restoring Iraq's stability.

Iraq and its authorities, first and foremost, as well as the neighbouring countries and regional and other external actors involved in Iraq, must act cautiously in the current circumstances in cooperating to achieve stability. Peru supports all initiatives that would serve to restore trust among all Iraqi sectors. My Government hopes that such initiatives will be reflected in a reduction in the level of violence in the region, particularly in Iraq, and in the number of refugees and displaced persons. Iraq needs more inclusiveness and committed partnership if it is to meet the immense challenges it faces.

Peru condemns sectarian violence and acts of intolerance, and rejects all terrorist attacks committed in Iraq. We encourage the Iraqi Government to strive resolutely to implement security policies, provide protection for all its citizens, and reinforce central control of its public forces. We also reaffirm that there is no place for impunity in the construction of democratic institutions in Iraq.

The reconstruction of Iraq is a central issue for its Government. Unfortunately, setbacks and delays have been caused by the lack of security and governability. We regret the deterioration in the provision of such basic services as education and even food. The International Compact with Iraq, a significant initiative to promote international assistance, would enjoy conditions more conducive to its launching if it were accompanied by improved security and reconciliation. Iraq's petroleum wealth should be managed transparently and responsibly in order to ensure that all Iraqi society benefits from its exploitation. If revenues generated by the petroleum sector are distributed on a negotiated basis, they will strengthen the climate of understanding among Iraqis and their confidence that their resources will serve to build a better future for Iraq's citizens.

Finally, my delegation expresses its support for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). We are of the view that UNAMI should continue to work, in accordance with its mandate and opportunities in the field, to consolidate all tasks that would serve to restore political and legal stability, relaunch institutional and economic reconstruction, promote humanitarian assistance, and protect human rights in Iraq.

Mr. Liu Zhenmin (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation welcomes the participation of Mr. Mahdi, Vice-President of Iraq, and his statement.

The Chinese delegation thanks Mr. Qazi, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Iraq, and the representative of the United States for their presentations.

We have carefully read the comprehensive and thoughtful report submitted by Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon a few days ago. We agree with the report.

Last weekend, an international conference on Iraq was held in Baghdad. The countries neighbouring Iraq, the five permanent members of the Security Council, the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference all sent representatives to take part. This was the first international conference held within Iraq after the end of the Iraq war, and therefore it is of particular significance. The conference was held in a very good atmosphere. The various parties had an extensive exchange of views on issues covering politics, security, economic reconstruction and the repatriation of refugees in Iraq. We hope that that good atmosphere can continue so that there can be new breakthroughs on solutions to the Iraqi issue.

Since the end of the Iraqi war, the people of Iraq have traversed an extraordinary path. Under extremely difficult circumstances they have overcome various difficulties and have roughly completed the political transition process set out in resolution 1546 (2004). At present, Iraq is entering a completely new stage of development. However, as the Secretary-General states in his report, the security situation, the economic reconstruction and the humanitarian situation in Iraq

all leave much to be desired, and the country still faces many challenges.

At the political level, the new Iraqi Government needs to do all it can to promote the inclusiveness of the political process, to foster national reconciliation and to find appropriate solutions to the outstanding issues related to formulating a constitution. Iraq's various regions and ethnic groups should put the national interest first and resolve their differences through dialogue. In that regard, we appreciate the efforts of the Arab States to promote national reconciliation in Iraq. We also support the initiative by the League of Arab States on the convening of a national reconciliation conference in Iraq.

As for security, the various factions in Iraq should renounce force and seek to resolve their differences by peaceful and democratic means. The Iraqi Government and the Multinational Force must attack the root causes of instability. Resorting solely to military force attacks only the symptoms, rather than the root causes. Furthermore, it would worsen the vicious circle of responding to violence with violence, giving rise to greater terror and instability.

We hope that the Iraqi Government will shoulder greater responsibility for maintaining security and public order in Iraq so as to restore public confidence and trust in the Government. At the same time, the Multinational Force must send a message that it will not stay permanently in Iraq, so as to improve its image in the country. We noted that the Iraqi Government recently produced a new Baghdad security plan. We hope that the plan will help improve public security and win the hearts of the Iraqi people.

In economic terms, the Iraqi Government must promote economic reconstruction expeditiously so as to produce real results and effectively improve the living conditions of the people of Iraq. We support the International Compact initiated jointly by Iraq and the United Nations. We hope that it will ensure equal and equitable participation by all parties in the country's economic reconstruction and will establish a new type of cooperation partnership between Iraq and the international community so as to help Iraq address the various difficulties it faces. We hope that the International Compact will play its due role as soon as possible.

The issue of Iraq cannot be resolved without the help and support of its neighbouring countries. The security of Iraq has a direct bearing on the stability of all its neighbours. We welcome the fact that the Foreign Minister and Minister for Internal Affairs of Iraq will hold regular regional meetings with their counterparts in neighbouring countries. We hope that all parties will continue to increase their mutual confidence through dialogue.

China has always supported the upholding of the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Iraq. We also believe that appropriate solutions must be found through political means. We support the United Nations playing an important role in the reconstruction process in Iraq, and we hope that the various parties will create suitable conditions in that regard. We sincerely hope that, with the support and help of the international community and through their own unremitting efforts, the people of Iraq can achieve the objective of an Iraq ruled by Iraqis so as to re-create a new Iraq that is equal to its past glory.

Ms. Pierce (United Kingdom): I would like to join colleagues in thanking Ambassador Qazi for his presentation on the Secretary-General's report. I would also like to express, along with other representatives, particular thanks to His Excellency the Vice-President for agreeing to join us in the Council and for giving a presentation on behalf of his Government. I also thank Ambassador Wolff for his presentation on behalf of the Multinational Force in Iraq.

The United Kingdom stands firm in offering its support to Prime Minister Al-Maliki and his Government as they tackle the challenges that Iraq faces. In particular, we welcome the effort and commitment of the Government of Iraq to confront all forms of sectarian violence, including through the Baghdad security plan. As the Secretary-General's report notes, national reconciliation is of the utmost importance, but if it is to be achieved, the cycle of attacks must first be broken. For our part, the United Kingdom is committed to doing all we can to help through our military contribution to the Multinational Force, as well as through our diplomatic and development efforts.

The countries of the region, as many speakers today have noted, have a particularly important role to play in helping to preserve the unity and territorial integrity of Iraq. Strong bilateral relations between Iraq and its neighbours are a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for success. We also encourage the

neighbouring countries to work in partnership with the Iraqi Government and to match its determination to tackle the challenges facing Iraq.

In that regard, the United Kingdom shares the Secretary-General's view that the expanded meeting of Iraq's neighbours held in Baghdad on 10 March was a welcome initiative by the Government of Iraq. A number of speakers today have also drawn attention to that, which is very welcome. The United Kingdom was pleased to take part, and I take pleasure in congratulating Iraq's leaders on that successful event. At the meeting, participants extended their support for Iraq's sovereignty, independence, national unity and territorial integrity. They also recognized the principle of non-interference. The United Kingdom reiterates its endorsement of those principles.

The United Kingdom looks forward to the event to be held here in New York tomorrow by the United Nations and the Government of Iraq on the International Compact. We urge the international community and the Government of Iraq to give it their full backing.

The United Kingdom would like to echo the Secretary-General's appreciation for his Special Representative and for the staff of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI) and what they do. We pay tribute to the men and women who work there in often difficult conditions. Despite the security challenges, UNAMI has a crucial role to play in supporting the Government of Iraq. UNAMI offers support throughout the country, including in capacity-building, in the constitutional review process, in the preparation for elections and in coordinating humanitarian assistance.

In this last respect, we welcome the leadership that UNAMI is providing in the humanitarian field. We encourage it to continue to work closely with the Government of Iraq so as to increase its ability to provide basic services to its people. We ourselves are helping to provide further funding to international organizations working on the issue of internally displaced persons.

Given the importance of the United Nations role in Iraq, I should like to take this opportunity to urge Member States to respond positively to the Secretary-General's call for additional funds. These are needed to continue the Distinct Entity Trust Fund, which pays the cost of the middle-ring security protective force. It is that force that enables UNAMI to continue its mission. We cannot and should not allow lack of money to hinder or stop the vital work that UNAMI is doing.

Finally, we note the Secretary-General's observations on Basra, in the south. As part of our work to transition security responsibility to the Iraqis in the south, the United Kingdom will soon consolidate our forces at the Basra Air Base. We remain in close contact with the United Nations over the logistics of this move and we are looking at steps that would allow UNAMI to play an active and productive role in the south of Iraq.

The President: I will now make a statement in my national capacity.

South Africa welcomes the Iraq Security Conference held in Baghdad on 10 March 2007 and supports attempts to achieve an all-inclusive political process and national reconciliation in Iraq as well as constructive dialogue with the neighbouring States. We look forward to participating tomorrow in the International Compact with Iraq. We remain concerned at the extremely high levels of violence and abuses of human rights by all sides, which have overshadowed any peace and reconstruction efforts in Iraq.

This violence has exacerbated the humanitarian situation and led to increased numbers of internally displaced persons and refugees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees estimates that there are at least 1.6 million Iraqis displaced internally and up to 1.8 million Iraqis in neighbouring States, particularly Syria and Jordan. This situation has undoubtedly placed a particular strain on Iraq's neighbours and has the potential of grave negative spillover effects for the region.

Notwithstanding the events that led to the current situation in Iraq, the Security Council has a responsibility to ensure that the powers granted to the Multinational Force in Iraq (MNF-I) are exercised in a manner consistent with the decisions of the Security Council and that international law and human rights are upheld and respected by all parties. It is for this reason that we support and wish to pay tribute to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) for its fearless service in Iraq. The grave situation in Iraq and the wider Middle East demands the concerted attention and action of both the countries in the region and the rest of the world.

The United Nations has a particularly important role to play. But the full potential of the United Nations to assist the Iraqi people can only be realized when its personnel can operate freely in a secure environment. As President Thabo Mbeki wrote recently,

> "... the question can no longer be avoided. Is it not time that the United Nations, genuinely representing all nations, assumes its rightful position and leads a global process to address all the interconnected challenges facing the peoples of the Middle East and West Asia?"

I now resume my duties as President of the Council. I shall now give the floor to Mr. Qazi to respond to comments and whatever questions may have been raised.

Mr. Qazi: I would first of all like to thank the members of the Security Council for their generous statements about the work that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq (UNAMI) is trying to perform in Iraq, and for their statements of continued support for UNAMI and for the invaluable suggestions that they have made which we have taken careful note of.

I would also like to personally add a word of deep appreciation for the presence of His Excellency the Vice-President of Iraq, who has provided an extra dimension of added value to the proceedings of today's meetings. I would also like to reiterate the fact that the Secretary-General attaches the highest priority to contributing, through UNAMI and through the United Nations country team for Iraq and other agencies and funds, to the restoration of peace, stability and normalcy in Iraq.

In this regard, the commitment of the Secretary-General is made evident by his decision to convene an International Compact meeting tomorrow, which will also be attended by His Excellency the Vice-President, and which will provide a framework for the launch of the Compact process and the implementation of a grand partnership between Iraq and the international community in order to assist the Government and people of Iraq in implementing their reform programmes and reconciliation programmes, and in order to realize a nationally-shared national vision of the future of Iraq.

I think that is a process in which the entire world has a stake. Recent developments, including the meetings of 10 March and future meetings at the ministerial level among neighbours and expanded versions of these meetings, testify to the recognition of the stake we all have in the success of the efforts of the Government of Iraq. UNAMI is privileged to stand ready to assist the Government and people of Iraq in every respect. With these words, I thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President: I have the honour to give the floor to the Vice-President.

Mr. Abdal Mahdi (Iraq) (*spoke in* Arabic): I would like to sincerely thank all members of the Security Council for the valuable comments that they have made. The Government of Iraq will take all of these observations into consideration and will uphold its duties in accomplishing national reconciliation. It will play its role as a Government in dealing with all citizens in a manner that is based on citizenship, with no sectarian or factional considerations.

I would like to draw the attention of members of the Council to an important fact. In Iraq today, there is violence caused by the great developments that have befallen our country and by its decades-long violent history. This violence has political dimensions, and we are extremely serious in our attempts to find political solutions since they are more important than security solutions.

However, there is another form of violence, which is the responsibility of the international community and Iraq's neighbouring countries. I speak now of the violence that took the life of the late Special Representative of the Secretary-General, Mr. Sergio Vieira di Mello, and the violence that has claimed the lives of many diplomats, journalists and citizens from the Russian Federation, France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Algeria and Egypt.

This kind of violence, I believe, is not simply an Iraqi responsibility. This terrorism is a regional and international responsibility. I believe that it is incumbent upon the United Nations to assist Iraq and to lend a helping hand in confronting this kind of violence which is the result of international networks and which is widely funded by many international institutions.

The President: On behalf of the Council, we thank the Vice-President of Iraq for his participation in this meeting today. I also wish to thank Mr. Qazi, the

Special Representative of the Secretary-General, and Mr. Wolff, all for their briefings to this Council. We thank them very much.

The Security Council has thus concluded the present stage of its consideration of the item on its agenda.

The meeting rose at 5.20 p.m.